

The logo features two large, bold, black letters 'R' and 'R' with a red ampersand between them. Below the letters is a dark, reflective surface with a small red circular light reflecting on it.

**REASON & REVELATION**

*A Monthly Journal of Christian Evidences*

AUGUST 2013 • VOL. 33 • NO. 8

The background of the cover is a photograph of a person's hand holding a dark blue, textured Bible. The Bible has 'HOLY BIBLE' printed on it in white. The person is wearing a grey t-shirt and blue jeans. The title 'THE IMPRECATORY Psalms' is overlaid on the top right of the image.

# THE IMPRECATORY *Psalms*

**Jephthah's**  
Daughter

---

*Resurrection as a Fact of Science*

---

*New Children's Book on Space*





# The Imprecatory Psalms

Dave Miller, Ph.D.

**T**HE book of Psalms in the Old Testament contains 150 separate psalms written by David and various other individuals inspired by the God of the Bible to write them, initially, for the nation of Israel. Critics of the Bible, who question its divine inspiration, insist that the “imprecatory” psalms are proof of the human origin of the Psalms. For example, Psalm 5:10 states: “Pronounce them guilty, O God! Let them fall by their own counsels; cast them out in the multitude of their transgressions, for they have rebelled against You.” Psalm 18:40-42 declares: “You have also given me the necks of my enemies, so that I destroyed those who hated me.... Then I beat them as fine as the dust before the wind; I cast them out like dirt in the streets.” Psalm 35:1-8 asserts:

Plead my cause, O LORD, with those who strive with me; fight against those who fight against me. Take hold of shield and buckler, and stand up for my help. Also draw out the spear, and stop those who pursue me.... Let those be put to shame and brought to dishonor who seek after my life; let those be turned back and brought to confusion who plot my hurt. Let them be like chaff before the wind, and let the angel of the LORD chase them. Let their way be dark and slippery, and let the angel of the LORD pursue them.... Let destruction come upon him unexpectedly, and let his net that he has hidden catch himself; into that very destruction let him fall.

Psalm 58:6-10 is equally graphic:

Break their teeth in their mouth, O God! Break out the fangs of the young lions, O LORD! Let them flow away as waters which run continually; when he bends his bow, let his arrows be as if cut in pieces. Let them be like a snail which melts away as it goes, like a stillborn child of a woman, that they may not see the sun. Before your pots can feel the burning thorns, He shall take them away as with a whirlwind, as in His living and burning wrath. The righteous shall rejoice when he sees the vengeance; He shall wash his feet in the blood of the wicked.

And Psalm 55:15 exclaims: “Let death seize them; let them go down alive into hell....”

Critics of the Bible claim that the imprecatory psalms are proof that the Bible is not inspired (e.g., McKinsey, 2000, p. 394; Vjack, 2009). They say that the psalms are hateful, vindictive, and manifest an unchristian spirit. They say such “hate speech” demonstrates that the author(s) of the Psalms could not have been inspired by a divine Being. Atheists say these psalms prove that the Hebrew God is a blood thirsty, tribal deity like all the other pagan deities conjured up by mere men. Of course, the New Testament is not exempt from this same accusation, since Old Testament words of imprecation are quoted in the New Testament approvingly. For example, John 15:25 quotes Psalm 109:3, Acts 1:20 draws from Psalm 69:25 and Psalm 109:8, Romans 11:9-10 quotes Psalm 69:22-23, and Romans 15:3 refers to Psalm 69:9.

What’s more, the New Testament contains its own imprecations that are comparable to those in the Old Testament. Paul declared: “Alexander the copper-smith did me much harm. May the Lord repay him according to his works. You also must beware of him, for he has greatly resisted our words” (2 Timothy 4:14-15). When hauled before the Jewish authorities, Paul suffered when “the high priest Ananias commanded those who stood by him to strike him on the mouth. Then Paul said to him, ‘God will strike you, you whitewashed wall! For you sit to judge me according to the law, and do you command me to be struck contrary to the law?’” (Acts 23:2-3; cf. Dungan, 1888, p. 319). Such sarcastic exclamations by Paul are also seen in his suggestion that the Judaizers be castrated (Galatians 5:12), and his remarks to the Corinthians:

For such are **false apostles, deceitful workers**, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if **his ministers** also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, **whose end will be according to their works....** For you put up with fools gladly, since you yourselves are wise! (2 Corinthians 11:13-15, 19, emp. added).

And when Simon attempted to bribe the apostles in hopes of receiving miraculous ability,

Peter said to him, “Your money **perish with you**, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money! You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this **your wickedness**, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you are **poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity**” (Acts 8:20-23, emp. added).

Further, Paul minced no words when he denounced his fellow Jews:

For you also suffered the same things from your own countrymen, just as they did from the Judeans, who killed

both the Lord Jesus and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they do not please God and are contrary to all men, forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they may be saved, so as always to fill up the measure of their sins; but **wrath has come upon them to the uttermost** (1 Thessalonians 2:14-16, emp. added).

And the faithful martyrs of persecution “cried with a loud voice, saying, ‘How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and **avenge our blood** on those who dwell on the earth?’” (Revelation 6:10).

Are such Bible passages inappropriate, unkind, unchristian, and unloving? Does the Bible contradict itself in this regard? Is the inspiration of the Bible writers compromised by the imprecatory psalms? How are we to make sense of this seeming disparity? Consider the following seven observations.

### PROPHETIC, PERSONAL FEELINGS, & POETRY

**I**n the first place, some of these psalms are merely prophetic: the psalmist announces what the enemies of God deserve and what, in fact, will come upon them—without conveying the actual desires of the psalmist (Barnes, 2005, 1:xxx). Second, some of these psalms may be expressions of the feelings that would be felt by those who would take vengeance on the enemies of God—those armies that God would use to punish the wicked (Barnes, 1:xxxi). Third, the English reader must understand that Hebrew poetry used extravagant language that is often exaggerated, passionate, and picturesque—not intended to be taken literally (cf. Barnes, 1:xxix-xxx). The oriental mind often expressed itself in terms that the Western mind might consider disrespectful when, in fact, the speaker was not being disrespectful (e.g., Jesus referring to Mary as “woman”—John 2:4; cf. Lyons, 2004).

### SIN IS REALLY BAD

**W**HILE these first three observations (identified by Barnes) have merit, a fourth clarification, one that

is more to the point, concerns the fact that most humans fail to realize just how heinous sin is, and the need for human sin to be denounced for its extreme ugliness. We humans simply do not have a handle on the gravity of sin. In a day when merely stating that a certain act is sinful is regarded as “hate speech,” “mean-spirited,” and “intolerant,” it is increasingly difficult for Americans to grasp the heinousness of sin. It is absolutely imperative that people train, shape, and mold their moral sensibilities to mimic God’s. They must strive to “have the mind of Christ” so that they have the right balance and the correct assessment and attitude toward every human action. An accurate assessment of spiritual reality requires that we must “abhor what is evil” (Romans 12:9) and “hate every false way” (Psalm 119:104). We must possess the same righteous revulsion that God possesses for those things that are spiritually repulsive and harmful.

The case of the Israelites at Peor provides a proper example of what it means to approximate the proper, righteous reaction to sin. When Phinehas followed a fornicating couple into their tent and, with a single thrust, drove a spear through the two of them, God’s

assessment of his action is seen in the following words:

Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, has turned back My wrath from the children of Israel, because **he was zealous with My zeal** among them, so that I did not consume the children of Israel in My zeal. Therefore say, “Behold, I give to him My covenant of peace; and it shall be to him and his descendants after him a covenant of an everlasting priesthood, **because he was zealous for his God**, and made atonement for the children of Israel” (Numbers 25:11-13, emp. added).

One prominent reason atheists and the like are disturbed by the imprecatory psalms is because their spirits have been shaped by their own flawed conceptions concerning the nature of an infinite, eternal God who is perfect in all of His attributes. If such a God exists (and He does), the imprecatory psalms capture the essence of perfect love in harmony with perfect justice. This thought brings us to a fifth clarification.

### GOD IS PERFECT

**G**OD is righteous. The very nature of God is contrary to evil. God’s very character and essence—His justice, His goodness, His holy hatred of all that is evil—demands that He take two actions: (1) express His love by

**Reason & Revelation** is published monthly by Apologetics Press, Inc. Periodicals postage paid at Montgomery, AL. **Postmaster:** Send address changes to **Reason & Revelation**, 230 Landmark Dr., Montgomery, AL 36117; **ISSN:** [1542-0922] **USPS#** 023415.

**Apologetics Press** is a non-profit, tax-exempt work dedicated to the defense of New Testament Christianity. Copyright © 2013. All rights reserved.

#### Editor:

Dave Miller, Ph.D.\*  
(\*Communication, Southern Illinois University)

#### Associate Editor:

Kyle Butt, M.A.\*  
(\*New Testament, Freed-Hardeman University)

#### Annual Subscription Rates:

\$12.00	Domestic
\$10.00	Domestic Bulk (5+ to same address)
\$12.00	Canada & Overseas (plus shipping)

#### General inquiries, changes of address, or international callers:

Phone: (334) 272-8558  
Fax: (334) 270-2002

#### Orders:

Phone: (800) 234-8558  
Fax: (800) 234-2882

On-line Web store/catalog, subscription order/renewal form, current issues, archives, and other information (all orders processed on a secure server):

URL: [www.ApologeticsPress.org](http://www.ApologeticsPress.org)  
URL: [espanol.ApologeticsPress.org/espanol](http://espanol.ApologeticsPress.org/espanol)  
E-mail: [mail@ApologeticsPress.org](mailto:mail@ApologeticsPress.org)

**Discovery—Scripture & Science for Kids** is a sister publication for children. For more information, please contact our offices or visit the Discovery Web site at:  
URL: [www.DiscoveryMagazine.com](http://www.DiscoveryMagazine.com)



atonement for sin in order to make a way for people to be forgiven, and (2) then punish those who choose not to avail themselves of that love. Since we humans have indulged in sin, we lack a proper perspective for offering a correct assessment of the righteous nature of God. Hence, we lack a clear understanding of why the psalms of imprecation are spiritually pure.

### PUNISHMENT IS NOT EVIL

**A**SIXTH clarification concerns the fact that **punishment is right and good—and not in conflict with true compassion.** Current culture has difficulty conceptualizing the fact that retribution is a godly, righteous principle that applies to individuals as well as groups of individuals (e.g., nations). All laws from God have attached to them appropriate, just penalties—which are **right and good** to invoke. In fact, laws without penalties would be a farce! Consider the inspired historian's report regarding the reign of Zedekiah:

And the Lord God of their fathers sent warnings to them by His messengers, rising up early and sending them, because **He had compassion** on His people and on His dwelling place. But they mocked the messengers of God, despised His words, and scoffed at His prophets, until **the wrath of the Lord arose** against His people, till there was no remedy. Therefore He brought against them the king of the Chaldeans, who killed their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and **had no compassion** on young man or virgin, on the aged or the weak; He gave them all into his hand (2 Chronicles 36:15-17, emp. added).

Observe that God “had compassion” on people in that He provided them with warnings and information that would enable them to be happy and righteous. But they spurned that instruction (even as Americans are spurning God's moral framework today), which naturally and rightly elicited the “wrath of the Lord.” That wrath manifested itself in the form of enemies wreaking havoc on the people. The enemy “had no compassion,” which

implies that God's perfect compassion does not mean that He will exempt people from the punishment that is due them because of their own behavioral choices.

Interestingly, we humans have built into our nature a realization of this spiritual principle (that cannot be accounted for on the basis of naturalistic evolution). We, in fact, approve of punishment when properly inflicted—from the proper discipline of children to the punishment of a mass murderer. We are no more to be blamed for approving the punishment of the guilty than we are for approving the acquittal of the innocent. God authored both the law and the proper **penalties** of law (the “curse” of Galatians 3:10). Peter implied the appropriateness of punishment when he asked Christians: “For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently?” (1 Peter 2:20). Corporal punishment for certain faults is right (cf. Deuteronomy 25:2; Psalm 89:32; Luke 12:47-48). Indeed, the Bible insightfully affirms: “Blows that hurt cleanse away evil, as do stripes the inner depths of the heart” (Proverbs 20:30). [NOTE: Parents who refuse to spank their children, mistakenly buying into current culture's warped assessment of what constitutes proper discipline, fail to grasp God's own directives on the matter (e.g., Proverbs 13:24; 19:18; 22:15; 23:13-14; 29:15,17).]

God's nature defines sin and punishment. Law was given by God to define crime and designate its just penalty. The more our society moves away from firm commitment to law and punishment, the more our society will be crime-ridden and filled with anarchy and bloodshed. Liberals—in both the church and society at large—continually chip away at the divinely bestowed power of law and its due punishment. This incessant dissolution has been transpiring in the penal system of America for over 50 years. It is associated with the significant shift from focus on the rights of the victim to the rights of the criminal.

### Due Punishment

One sample of this malady is seen in the liberal media's attempt to paint punishment as somehow mean, cruel, and barbaric. As an example, the media tried to create public sympathy for a woman convicted in 1984 of murdering two people in Houston, Texas. Karla Faye Tucker participated with her boyfriend in the brutal, horrifying death of a couple lying in bed when she used a pickaxe to puncture her victim with multiple stab wounds. After sitting on death row for nine years, her lawyer and other supporters insisted that “she has now undergone a startling change. She has found religion, has pursued an education and does not deserve to die” (“Texas Set...,” 1992). Tucker, herself, contended that she is “a changed woman who has found God and can serve as a resource for others if her death sentence is changed to life in prison” (“Woman's Texas...,” 1998). Observe that by accentuating the perpetrator as a **woman**—and the first **woman** to be executed since the Civil War—as well as stressing that she has “found religion,” the media sought to divert attention away from the gravity and heinousness of her behavior by playing on emotion and pointing to completely irrelevant information. The transparent assumption is that due punishment for flagrant crime is somehow inherently evil, unmerciful, or unforgiving.

Such notions are fraught with misconception and spiritual confusion. They betray the critical realization that such people are unacquainted with the infinite, perfect God; they lack an accurate assessment of the nature of deity. They fail to understand that God's forgiveness of sin extends to the **guilt** of sin—not its physical **consequences**. Contrast Karla Faye's uninformed, biblically illiterate attitude with that of Paul who, when he stood before Porcius Festus, the Roman procurator of Judea, to give account of accusations made against him, declared: “If I am an offender, or have committed anything worthy of death, **I do not object to dying**” (Acts 25:11,

(cont. on p. 92)



## The Resurrection as a Fact of Science

Kyle Butt, M.A.

Famed atheist and *New York Times* bestselling author Sam Harris published a book in 2010 titled *The Moral Landscape: How Science Can Determine Human Values*. In the book he attempted to show that atheistic materialism can provide a standard by which to judge moral behavior. He failed to prove his point, as we have shown elsewhere (Butt, 2008), but he did make some telling admissions.

In the introduction, Harris provided an endnote that described his view of the concept of a “fact.” He stated:

For the purposes of this discussion, I do not intend to make a hard distinction between “science” and other intellectual contexts in which we discuss “facts”—e.g., history. For instance, it is a fact that John F. Kennedy was assassinated. Facts of this kind fall within the context of “science,” broadly construed as our best effort to form a rational account of empirical reality. Granted, one doesn’t generally think of events like assassinations as “scientific” facts, but the murder of President Kennedy is as fully corroborated a fact as can be found anywhere, and it would betray a profoundly unscientific frame of mind to deny that it occurred (2010, p. 195).

Harris is exactly right. Events that happened in the past such as assassinations can be every bit as scientific and factual as other types of experiential knowledge. In fact, those of us who believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ have contended for years that direct observation is not necessarily needed to establish it as factual. If the assassination of J.F.K. can be nailed down scientifically and established as a fact, is it not also true that the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus Christ can be equally validated as a scientific fact in the way Harris describes? Certainly it is. (We

have established the case for the fact of the resurrection elsewhere, see Butt, 2002.)

“In our best effort to form a rational account of empirical reality” we are forced to conclude that no other series of events offers the explanatory power of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. The event is recorded in detail in the only book in the world that is proven to be inspired by God. Hundreds of people in the first century saw the resurrected Lord, and testified of such. And the fact is that Jesus’ tomb was empty.

These facts and others combine to provide a cumulative scientific case to establish the fact of Jesus’ resurrection. Of course, Sam Harris would disagree about the resurrection of Christ being a fact. But his insightful discussion of what actually constitutes a scientific fact opens the door for the resurrected Lord to walk through. “And it would betray a profoundly unscientific frame of mind to deny that it occurred.”

### REFERENCES

- Butt, Kyle (2002), “Jesus Christ—Dead or Alive?” *Reason and Revelation*, <https://www.apologeticspress.org/apcontent.aspx?category=10&article=147>.
- Butt, Kyle (2008), “The Bitter Fruits of Atheism,” *Reason and Revelation*, <http://www.apologeticspress.org/apcontent.aspx?category=12&article=2515>.
- Harris, Sam (2010), *The Moral Landscape: How Science Can Determine Human Value* (New York: Free Press).



ER  
Resources



# Exploring Space with Two Astrophysicists

## Do You Like...to Paint?

Most kids love to paint, especially when they have no pressures or grades, and are permitted to paint whatever they want. They enjoy using crayons, markers, and paint brushes to create all manner of characters, creatures, and creations.

## Do You Like... Outer Space?

Most kids also love space. They are fascinated by planets, stars, nebulae, and galaxies. Staring into space at night allows kids to experience one manifestation of God's awesome Creation.

## Does God Like...to Paint?

is designed to compare the common tasks of drawing, coloring, painting, and sculpting, with the creativeness of God. As Creator, He demonstrates, not only His purposeful design and functional order in the Universe, but His creativity and imagination.



For orders please call

**(800) 234-8558**

or visit

[www.apologeticspress.org/webstore](http://www.apologeticspress.org/webstore)



**\$8.95**

\*Plus shipping  
Taxes apply in Alabama

Does God Like...

to Paint?

Exploring Space with Two Astrophysicists

by Branyon May, Ph.D.  
& Alana May, M.S.

Does God Like... to Paint?

Branyon & Alana May





emp. added). Here is inspired, tacit acknowledgement of the validity of capital punishment—due punishment for behavior that is **worthy of death**. Imagine if Karla Faye had known her Bible well enough to announce to the world that, while she now understood the Gospel and had submitted herself to Christ, nevertheless, she fully recognized her guilt and was perfectly willing to receive the proper punishment due for her crimes against society. The liberal media, no doubt, would have immediately silenced her by refusing to report such a statement—a statement that would have immediately “taken the wind out of the sails” of their propaganda.

God has always harnessed civil government to take vengeance on those who need to be punished. As Paul explained to Christians in Rome: “For he [the civil government—DM] is God’s minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God’s minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil” (Romans 13:4). For the government to “bear the sword” (i.e., utilize capital punishment) is “good” and it is not “in vain,” i.e., it is not an inappropriate or useless action. It is God’s will for those who perpetrate crimes on society to be confronted and properly processed in accordance with righteous principles. God requires each person to bear responsibility for his or her own actions. This principle was articulated repeatedly by God in the civil law code He gave to the Israelites by means of the phrases “his blood shall be upon him” (Leviticus 20:9,13,27; Deuteronomy 19:10; Ezekiel 18:13; 33:5) and “his blood be on his own head” (Joshua 2:19; 2 Samuel 1:16; Ezekiel 33:4; Acts 18:6).

### Misdefined Compassion

Much of American society has been severed from the moral framework God gave to nations to make sense of human behavior. Most people merely make their moral and ethical decisions based on their personal opinions, rooted largely in their emotions and feelings—how things **seem** to them. They misdefine

“compassion.” Only Deity is capable of defining compassion, and harmonizing it with justice and punishment. The Law of Moses provides God’s delineation of appropriate punishment in the broad, summarizing declaration of the *lex talionis*: “Your eye shall not pity; but life shall be for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot” (Deuteronomy 19:21). This prescription was neither unloving nor immoral. It was intended to promote just and fair punishment.

By altering God’s laws, thinking we are being compassionate and merciful (i.e., allowing our “eye to show pity”), we can be guilty of circumventing and frustrating the purposes of God. Indeed, many arrogant politicians and judges are guilty of thinking they are **more loving than God**. They redefine love to mean sentimentality, subjective feelings, and an attitude of “tolerance” that insists on all people being allowed to do anything they desire—without question or condemnation. They are unable or unwilling to grasp the idea that God will continue to love every person consigned to hell—even as loving parents reluctantly inflict pain on their children in the form of proper discipline. True compassion does not and cannot exclude the application of just punishment. Indeed, genuine love embraces it.

The wholesome blending of compassion and justice is actually seen in the imprecatory psalms themselves. For example, in Psalm 109 David explains that the wicked had exchanged the love and goodness that he had extended to them for hatred and evil: “In return for **my love** they are my accusers, but I give myself to prayer. Thus they have rewarded me evil **for good**, and hatred for **my love**” (vss. 4-5, emp. added). Psalm 83 couples the psalmist’s call for the shame and dismay of the wicked with a desire that they come to their senses, abandon their evil behavior, and get themselves right with God: “Fill their faces with shame, **that they may seek Your name**, O LORD. Let them be confounded and dismayed forever; yes, let them be put to shame

and perish, **that they may know that You, whose name alone is the LORD, are the Most High over all the earth**” (vss. 16-18, emp. added). The psalmist even prayed for his enemies (35:12-14), even as Christians are admonished to do (Matthew 5:44). Following through with appropriate punishment of the one who spurns love is, in reality, a further extension of love—love for good and right, love for God, and yes, love for the wicked. Today’s distorted understanding of these eternal principles would imply that those who would condemn Satan himself ought to be derided as “intolerant,” “unloving,” and guilty of “hate speech.”

### Justifying the Wicked

The same malady has infected the criminal justice system, which has been transformed into a bargaining establishment in which prosecutors and defense attorneys barter with each other over the guilty—the prosecutor seeking to get as stringent a punishment as possible for the accused, while the defense attorney seeks to get his client minimal punishment. The premiere and ultimate concern of guilt or innocence has been swept aside. How many **murderers** have received prison sentences—some of which even permit eventual release? The words of God spoken through the Law of Moses desperately need to be heard today: “Moreover you shall **take no ransom for the life of a murderer** who is guilty of death, but he shall surely be put to death” (Numbers 35:31). The justice system has come to specialize in “plea bargaining”—another expression for taking ransom for the life of the murderer. How dare any judge or jury spare the life of a person that God demands to be executed! God warned the Israelites: “Keep yourself far from a false matter; do not kill the innocent and righteous. For I will not **justify the wicked**” (Exodus 23:7, emp. added). God declares that He will not justify the person who kills an innocent person. Yet, how many lawyers seek to acquit their **guilty** clients, thereby justifying



the wicked? [NOTE: For the Bible view of capital punishment, see Miller, 2012.]

Writing over a century ago, Moses Lard commented on the negative impact on American society of the crime of murder (listed in Romans 1:29), and predicted a frightful reaction from God for America's failure to address the crime in accordance with His will—

This crime, according to the Bible, **should always be punished with death.** But in our day, especially in our country, it generally brings with it only a good deal of notoriety, and not death. But we may rest assured of this, that God will one day visit on the people of this country **a fearful retribution for the indulgence which they show to the crime.** Take the life of him who willfully and with malice takes the life of his fellow man—do this surely, do it in all cases, and murder will cease. Fail to do this, and you breed mobs; for the world is apt to feel that a murderer hung by a mob is a less evil than a murderer turned loose by a corrupt court of law, to murder again at will. That is a morbid and most pernicious sentiment which forgets **what is due to God, to society, and to the murdered, through sickly sympathy for the murderer. It is devoid of justice; nor is it any proper expression of mercy** (1875, p. 64, emp. added).

Writing 70 years later, R.L. Whiteside echoed similar sentiments:

It is foolish to expect anything but an increase of murders.... Three things will decrease murders—: namely, (1) **quick and sure punishment of the killer**, (2) impress upon the growing generation higher regard for human life, and (3) teach them a deeper reverence of God and his word by impressing upon them that God is the rightful ruler and that we must give account to him. And it would do a lot of good for people to be reminded that a lot of foolish speculation **does not abolish hell** (1945, p. 42, emp. added).

These observations suggest that American society has been traveling down a road for over a century in which a healthy, sensible, indispensable view of crime and punishment has been steadily

eroding. We are now reaping the whirlwind (Hosea 8:7).

### CONDEMNING EVIL IS RIGHT

A final clarification that establishes the legitimacy and divinity of the imprecatory psalms is seen in the fact that **pronouncing a person's dire spiritual predicament is holy, right, and good** (Proverbs 27:5). The current "politically correct" portion of society, no doubt desiring to justify their own sins (Luke 10:29), claims that pinpointing misconduct is "mean-spirited," "judgmental," "intolerant," and "hate speech." But the spiritually-minded person, the one who has sought to emulate the spirit and temperament of Deity, understands the value and the necessity of being forthright in the condemnation of behavior that endangers society and souls. That is why Peter, quoted earlier, reacted so abruptly to Simon's attempt to bribe the apostles with money. That is why Paul could write by inspiration concerning the Judaizing teachers who sought to subvert souls: "I could wish that those who trouble you would even cut themselves off!" (Galatians 5:12). And it is why, in Matthew 23, Jesus Himself pronounced seven "woes" on the Pharisees, labeling them "hypocrites," "sons of hell," "blind guides," "fools and blind," "whitewashed tombs," "full of hypocrisy and lawlessness," and "serpents, brood of vipers." Imprecations were designed to signal a spiritual state of emergency in which the righteous person is fighting desperately for God's honor and reputation—while attempting to reclaim the recalcitrant. Imprecations even provide encouragement and reassurance for the faithful, motivating them to take courage and press the spiritual battle.

### SUMMARY

**A**LL of these observations point to the fact that it cannot be inherently wrong to desire the downfall and appropriate punishment of God's enemies. Those who are intensely interested in seeing God's will done on Earth (Matthew 6:10), will yearn and pray for God's justice to be done for all—with punishment

inflicted on those who deserve it. **This may be done without personal malice, or a vindictive or revengeful spirit.** Indeed, the imprecatory psalms are—

- Pure, unselfish zeal for the honor of God;
- Holy hatred of that which is contrary to the nature of God and His divine purposes;
- Righteous indignation—anger without sin (Ephesians 4:26);
- A desire to see the righteous character of God vindicated;
- A desire that those who hold God in contempt be held accountable;
- A desire to give glory to God's justice and goodness.

### One Question

But what are we to make of the apparent tension between the exclamations of the "imprecatory psalms" and the passages that warn the faithful not to glory in the death of the wicked? For example, Obadiah 12 warns: "But you should not have gazed on the day of your brother in the day of his captivity; nor should you have rejoiced over the children of Judah in the day of their destruction; nor should you have spoken proudly in the day of distress." Proverbs 24:17 states: "Do not rejoice when your enemy falls, and do not let your heart be glad when he stumbles." [NOTE: Jonah was wanting in this regard (Jonah 4:1).] Jesus commanded love for enemies (Matthew 5:44; Luke 6:35). Paul said Christians are to bless those who persecute them, overcome evil with good, and never render evil for evil (Romans 12:14,21; 1 Thessalonians 5:15). Peter said the same (1 Peter 3:9).

The answer lies in the fact that, like God, we do not desire that anyone be lost eternally. We take no joy or delight in those who die lost and face eternal torment. We hold no ill will or desire for personal vengeance against those who wrong us. Concerning this feature of the divine nature, Ezekiel 33:11 quotes God as saying: "I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from

your evil ways! For why should you die?" Paul alluded to this feature of divinity as well when he said that God "desires **all men** to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:4, emp. added). Peter added that God is "not willing that **any** should perish but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9, emp. added). **It is God's will that no human being go to hell!** Hence, all who are consigned to hell will have chosen to be there, based on the choices **they** made during their one and only probationary period on Earth. They cannot logically or justly blame **anyone else** for their own choices.

In perfect harmony with this principle is the fact that we should desire that those who refuse to turn from their evil ways be held accountable accordingly (cf. Moses' attitude in Numbers 14:13-23). What person in his or her right mind does not want to see a child rapist—say one who has sexually assaulted a five-year-old girl—be caught and punished for his foul deeds? While we should not harbor hatred in our hearts for such a degraded individual, we should possess a righteous desire that he be called to account for his heinous behavior and properly punished. This rational, righteous desire is one critical principle that is reflected in the imprecatory psalms.

For all wicked behavior (as defined by God Himself), we should desire to see His righteous character vindicated. Like the psalmist, we should be content to trust God that He will render suitable vengeance in His own way, in His own good time. Though God does not want anyone to be lost; though He loves—with a **perfect** love—every single person who has lived on Earth throughout the thousands of years of human history; nevertheless, He has plainly declared that He will consign the vast majority of them to a place of unending torment (Matthew 7:14; cf. Butt, 2012). We must respect this logical principle—and urge all humans to emulate it.

## CONCLUSION

**T**HE imprecatory psalms cannot rationally be used by atheists and

skeptics to disprove the divine origin of the Bible. Indeed, such material is precisely what we would expect to encounter in a document produced by a holy, infinite God. No logical argument, using the imprecatory psalms, may be set forth that proves that the Bible is not inspired by God.

All people on Earth are under obligation to face spiritual reality before it is too late. The ultimate imprecation looms before us. Hear the words of Jesus: "And I say to you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will show you whom you should fear: **Fear Him who, after He has killed, has power to cast into hell; yes, I say to you, fear Him!**" (Luke 12:4-5, emp. added). The threat of, and consignment to, hell is neither unloving nor unholy. All persons of accountable age and mind have the ability to choose the right course in life that will terminate in the heavenly home (Revelation 21:10-27). The God of the Bible earnestly desires and expects us to exercise that ability. Each individual decides his own eternal destiny by his own actions while on Earth.

## REFERENCES

- Barnes, Albert (2005 reprint), *Notes on the Old Testament: Psalms* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker).
- Butt, Kyle (2012), "Why Did God Create People—Knowing That Many Would Go to Hell?" Apologetics Press, <http://www.apologeticspress.org/APContent.aspx?category=12&article=4194>.
- Dungan, D.R. (1888), *Hermeneutics* (Delight, AR: Gospel Light).
- Lard, Moses (1875), *Commentary on Paul's Letter to Romans* (Lexington, KY: Transylvania Printing and Publishing).
- Lyons, Eric (2004), "How Rude!?" Apologetics Press, <http://www.apologeticspress.org/apcontent.aspx?category=6&article=770>.
- McKinsey, Dennis (2000), *Biblical Errancy* (New York: Prometheus Books).
- Miller, Dave (2012), "Capital Punishment and the Bible," *Reason & Revelation*, 32[7]:62-64, 68-71.
- "Texas Set to Execute First Woman Since 1863" (1992), *The New York Times*, June 21, <http://www.nytimes.com/1992/06/21/us/texas-set-to-execute-first-woman-since-1863.html>.
- Vjack (2009), "Psalm 109:8 Reveals Christian Extremist Hate," *Atheist Revolution*, November 23, <http://www.atheistrev.com/2009/11/psalm-1098-reveals-christian-extremist.html>.
- Whiteside, R.L. (1945), *A New Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Saints at Rome* (Denton, TX: Inys Whiteside).
- "Woman's Texas Execution to Proceed" (1998), *CNN*, February 2, <http://www.cnn.com/US/9802/02/tucker/index.html>.

## SPEAKING SCHEDULES

### Kyle Butt

August 4	Athens, AL	(256) 232-1096
August 7	Gardendale, AL	(205) 631-7000
August 23-26	Sevierville, TN	(877) 338-3397

### Eric Lyons

August 14	Decatur, AL	(256) 353-1876
August 21	Gardendale, AL	(205) 631-7000
August 26-29	Sevierville, TN	(256) 435-9356

### Dave Miller

August 7	Selma, AL	(334) 872-6329
August 28	Morrison, TN	(931) 635-2714

### Jeff Miller

August 14, 21	Selma, AL	(334) 874-7941
August 23-29	Sevierville, TN	(877) 338-3397





**I**N Judges 11, Jephthah vowed to God that if he were victorious in battle, he would give to God whatever came through the doors of his house upon his return from battle. The term used in 11:31 is *’olah*, the normal Hebrew word for a burnt offering or sacrifice (used 286 times in the Old Testament). Did Jephthah intend to offer his daughter as a human sacrifice? Are the ethics of God and the Bible shown to be substandard by this incident?

In the first place, if, in fact, Jephthah offered a human sacrifice, he did something that was strictly forbidden by Mosaic law and that is repugnant to God (Leviticus 18:21; 20:2-5; Deuteronomy 12:31; 18:10). It would be a bit bizarre for Jephthah to think that he could elicit God’s favor in battle by promising to offer Him a human sacrifice, that is, to do something that was in direct violation of the will of God. Though in keeping with the moral climate at the time (Judges 21:25), such a proposal would be equivalent to a person requesting God’s blessing and assistance by offering to rape women or rob banks. God certainly would not approve of such an offer—though He may go ahead and assist the individual (11:32). God allows people to make wrong choices, even while He works out His own higher will in the midst of their illicit actions. He can even use such people to achieve a higher good (consider, as one example, Judas). When Israel clamored for a king—in direct opposition to God’s will—He neverthe-

less allowed them to proceed with their intentions, and even lent His assistance in the selection (1 Samuel 8:7, 18-19; 10:19; 12:19; Psalm 106:14-15; Hosea 13:11; Acts 13:21).

Second, if Jephthah offered his daughter as a human sacrifice, no indication is given in the text that God actually approved of the action. The Bible records many illicit actions carried out by numerous individuals throughout history, without an accompanying word of condemnation by the inspired writer. We must not assume that silence is evidence of divine approval. Even the commendation of Jephthah’s faith in the New Testament does not offer a blanket endorsement to everything Jephthah did during his lifetime. It merely commended the faith that he demonstrated when he risked going to war. Similarly, the Bible commends the faith of Samson, and Rahab the prostitute, without implying that their behavior was always in harmony with God’s will. Abraham manifested an incredible level of faith on several occasions, and is commended for such (Romans 4:20-21). Yet he clearly sinned on more than one occasion (Genesis 12:13; 16:4; 20:2ff.).

Third, Jephthah’s action may best be understood by recognizing that he was using *’olah* in a figurative sense. We use the term “sacrifice” in a similar fashion when we say, “I’ll sacrifice a few dollars for that charity.” Jephthah was offering to sacrifice a member of his extended household to permanent, religious service associated with the Tabernacle. The

Bible indicates that such non-priestly service was available, particularly to women who chose to so dedicate themselves (e.g., Exodus 38:8). [Sadly, Eli’s sons were guilty of taking sexual liberties with them (1 Samuel 2:22).] Even in the first century, Anna must have been one who had dedicated herself to the Lord’s service, since she “did not depart from the temple” (Luke 2:37).

Several contextual indicators support this conclusion about Jephthah’s daughter. First, the two-month period of mourning that Jephthah granted to his daughter was not for the purpose of grieving over her impending loss of life, but over the fact that she would never be able to marry. She bewailed her virginity (*bethulim*)—not her death (11:37). Second, the text goes out of its way to state that Jephthah had no other children: “[S]he was his only child. Besides her he had neither son nor daughter” (11:34). For his daughter to be consigned to perpetual celibacy meant the extinction of Jephthah’s family line—an extremely serious and tragic matter to an Israelite (cf. Numbers 27:1-11; 36:1ff.). Third, the sacrifice is treated as unfortunate, again, not because of any concern over her death, but because she would not become a mother. After stating that Jephthah “did with her according to his vow which he had vowed,” the inspired writer immediately adds: “She knew no man” (11:39). This statement would be a completely superfluous and callous remark if she had been put to death. Fourth, the declaration of Jephthah’s own sorrow (11:35) follows immediately after we are informed that he had no other children (11:34). Jephthah was not upset because his daughter would die a virgin. He was upset because she would live and remain a virgin.

Hannah made a similar sacrifice when she turned her son over to the priestly direction of Eli for the rest of his life (1 Samuel 1:11). How many are willing to make such sacrifices? Actually, however, these tremendous acts of devotion were no greater than that which God requires of all Christians: to offer ourselves as spiritual burnt-offerings in service to God (Romans 12:1).



## NOTE FROM *The Editor*



### New Children's Book on Space

We at Apologetics Press continually seek to present with accuracy God's truth on vital subjects pertaining to God, His Creation, and His Word. In matters of science, we have sought to support our teachings with solid research by credentialed scientists who are as qualified to speak on scientific matters as their unbelieving colleagues in the scientific community. When young people leave home to attend university, they typically enroll in science classes that smother them with evolutionary propaganda. It is extremely important to insulate and prepare young people for this attack on their faith.

Imagine exposing children to thoughts presented to them by credentialed astrophysicists who are Christians. Imagine children being introduced to Christian scientists who do not buy into the propaganda of atheistic evolution and naturalism. For many years now, A.P. has provided such resources to succeeding generations of youth. We are excited



to offer yet another children's book that will help parents mold their children with godly precepts before they are exposed to the sinister ideology of godless evolution.

A.P. auxiliary scientist Branyon May, who holds a Ph.D. in Astrophysics, and his wife Alana, who holds an M.S. in Astrophysics, have written a book that draws attention to the Creator's amazing

artistic expressions as manifested by the cosmos. *Does God Like To Paint?* will thrill children and impress upon them the reality of the great Designer of the Universe who created spectacular astronomical phenomena that ought to instill awe and respect in us puny humans. You will want children you know to see this book!

**Dave Miller**

See the Center Spread  
for More Details